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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Afghanistan: Regime And Resistance Military Performance [REDACTED]

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SUMMARY

Based on regime and resistance performance since the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal on 15 May, we believe the Kabul regime will fall within six months to a year after all Soviet troops have left Afghanistan. The guerrillas have overrun seven provincial capitals but had to withdraw from four of them. They have taken many district centers and are maintaining military pressure despite the continued presence of substantial numbers of Soviet forces. The regime has not succeeded in filling the vacuum left by the departing Soviets. Nonetheless, Kabul's regular forces have shown more cohesion than we anticipated, in some cases, and their willingness to fight has on occasion surprised the guerrillas. Despite this showing, the regime's forces will be increasingly isolated and stretched thin, making them more vulnerable to insurgent attacks after the Soviets leave. [REDACTED]

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Abandoning the Border

Because of the Soviet withdrawal the Afghan regime was forced to abandon nearly all of the border with Pakistan. The regime hastily evacuated military and civilian personnel from the strategic post at Barikowt in the Konar Valley in mid-April rather than face a guerrilla offensive, according to the US Consulate in Peshawar. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a guerrilla assault and factional fighting between local militia and government forces disrupted the planned regime withdrawal from Ali Kheyl in May, resulting in heavy regime casualties and equipment losses. [REDACTED]

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This memorandum was prepared by [REDACTED] with a contribution from [REDACTED] Afghanistan Branch, South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and should be directed to Chief, South Asia Division, [REDACTED]

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Capturing the border area has had significant benefits for the resistance. Originally, regime border battalions were positioned to deny the insurgents access to short supply routes into the interior. The opening of these shorter routes has improved the insurgents' stock of supplies and their ability to supply insurgent forces in the interior. They can now cache large amounts of supplies in anticipation of the winter months, higher levels of fighting, or even a cutoff of arms supplies by the Pakistanis. The improved supply situation also has raised guerrilla confidence and morale. [REDACTED]

The War Shifts to the Interior

The regime's abandonment of the border has shifted the main focus of the fighting to the interior of the country. The types of operations each side will conduct has changed as well. The regime is shifting from ambush and interdiction operations to primarily defensive operations. The resistance gradually will shift from guerrilla hit-and-run tactics to conventional tactics, including fighting pitched battles and conducting siege operations. [REDACTED]

The regime will emphasize the defense of the major cities along the ring road and the roads leading to Pakistan. The insurgent strategy will concentrate on isolating the major cities by cutting the roads, isolating the regime garrisons, and starving them into submission. Because the insurgents are using this strategy, the war has begun to take on a regional flavor--the objective may be the capture of a single city but the operation will encompass a large geographic area, such as the southern provinces around Qandahar, and will involve insurgent commanders from several parties against large numbers of Afghan regime units. [REDACTED]

Roads Cut. Regime forces have not been able to prevent insurgent forces from cutting major roads and capturing dozens of district centers and towns. [REDACTED] the roads around nearly all provincial capitals in eastern and southern Afghanistan have been cut. The only roads that have remained open consistently are those from Kabul to Jalalabad and the USSR. All of the roads have been cut around Qandahar, according to the US Embassy in Kabul, although an occasional convoy from Herat gets through. [REDACTED]

Provincial Capitals Begin to Fall. There have been several major victories for the insurgency in the early stages of the Soviet withdrawal. The provincial capitals of Bamian, Paktika, and Takhar Provinces were captured by the insurgents in August and September. Bamian city was the [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

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[redacted]

first provincial capital that the regime admitted losing because of insurgent pressure. Bamian's isolation prevented the regime from adequately supporting its troops there. The regime may abandon other isolated provincial capitals, such as those in Ghowr and Oruzgan, in the near future. [redacted]

[redacted]

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Some Setbacks. The resistance, however, has had some setbacks. During the first three months of the withdrawal the insurgents captured a number of provincial capitals--including Qalat, Meymaneh, Kowt-e 'Ashrow, and Konduz that they were not able to hold. [redacted]

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Regime forces, however, have performed better than expected in some cases. [REDACTED] there have been a large number of whole unit desertions, although the threat of this happening appears to be just under the surface. Some regime garrisons have held up remarkably well under pressure. Kabul's forces also have counterattacked when the regime has determined the area lost or under pressure is worth the risk, [REDACTED] We believe regime successes were due to superior firepower, fortifications, minefields, and concentration of forces--as well as to the continued presence of Soviet forces. In the areas where the Soviet forces are no longer present, such as Spin Buldak, the regime has been unable to hold out in the face of insurgent pressure.

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Outlook

We expect the Afghan regime and insurgent forces to continue to contest for control of important cities in the east and south--notably Qandahar, Qalat, Asadabad, and Kowt-e 'Ashrow--while most other regime positions will remain surrounded and besieged. The next significant Soviet withdrawal almost certainly will result in a further contraction of the regime's defenses as the resistance gains control over more territory and possibly overruns several more provincial capitals. Insurgent military momentum will continue to be slowed by the intervention of Soviet forces, concerns that the regime will retaliate against the civilian population for siding with the insurgency, local insurgent factionalism, and ill-advised frontal assaults against fortified regime garrisons with superior firepower.

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Although we expect the level of combat to remain fairly high throughout the winter months, there probably will be a surge in combat activity in October and early November as the insurgents try to topple more regime garrisons before heavy snow limits movement, reducing the regime's ability to retaliate and worsening Kabul's already flagging morale. Desertions will continue at least at the present rate until the Soviets complete their

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**withdrawal as we expect in mid-February, when the rate almost certainly
will increase, followed by another surge in combat activity.**

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